

Metafora in druge »anomalije«

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Povzetek Metafore nas presenetijo kot dobesedno neresnične, interpretacija pa razkrije poseben motiv za figurativno rabo jezika. Za Davidsona je »predpostavljati, da lahko metafora učinkovita le s sporočanjem kodiranega sporočila, enako kot misliti, da neka šala ali sen izrekata neko izjavo, ki jo bister interpret lahko na novo in bolje formulira v preprosti prozi«. Ta opazka je izhodišče za primerjalno analizo interpretativnih strategij pri metaforah, protidejstvenih pogojnikih, šalah in ugankah. Pri vseh naletimo na neko začetno neskladje z našim doksastičnim sistemom in pri večini gre za »trk« in poskus združitve dveh pojmovnih področij. Na koncu predlagam, da naša sposobnost interpretiranja metafor temelji na sposobnosti dojetja posebne kognitivne vsebine, ki jo evocira metafora.

Ključne besede: • metafora • Davidson • šala • kognitivna vsebina • interakcijska teorija •

1 Introduction

I first met Dunja in the late eighties in the former Yugoslavia, but I will always remember the slender, elegant, short-haired lady as one of the pillars of our discussion group at the Maribor Philosophy Department (founded in 1993). For almost two decades, she helped us find our path through the complicated speculations so dear to philosophers, with her sober and down-to-earth comments. Her main scientific work lies at the intersection of linguistics and philosophy (Chomsky, nativism, theories of reference, and knowledge of language). However, I will address what is perhaps a minor trait in her work: her critical comments to Davidson on the meaning of metaphor. Apparently minor things sometimes transform into major ones, and Davidson (1978, reprinted in 2001) has certainly been one of the most influential texts in the ever growing literature on metaphor.¹

2 Jutronic on Davidson

Davidson asserts that the words in a metaphor mean nothing other than their original, literal meaning. Roughly put: metaphor is a pragmatic rather than a semantic phenomenon; "metaphor belongs exclusively to the domain of use." Metaphors cannot be paraphrased; rather than telling us that things are a certain way, metaphors make us *see* things in a certain way. After reading Davidson (1978) and Davidson (1986) jointly, Jutronic points out that it is unclear how to distinguish literal meaning from use, so the statement that metaphors are determined by use becomes almost vacuous because all of the language is language in use under Davidson's interpretation. She (rightly) protests and stresses the role of convention in constructing the first or dictionary meaning of our terms. "If utterances in context with unexpected meanings have to be figured out as deviations from first or dictionary meanings where convention is dominant then conventional rules still have to be learned and mastered /.../" (Jutronic 1999, 227). It might be true that interpretation is a work of the imagination, "but in language and in language use it is crucial how the imagination is curbed not to go unchecked, and the first step in how it is curbed is by conventions that are the starting point in every interpretation" (Jutronic 1999, 228).

¹ "/.../ unquestionably the most influential paper ever written by a philosopher of language on the subject of metaphor" (Reimer 2001, 142).

I would like to proceed in this spirit – contrary to Davidson who sometimes suggests that even the interpretation of literal language is not determined by rules. I think that even the creative use of language is “curbed” by certain interpretative strategies subject to rules and conventional strategies. I will compare metaphors to jokes, riddles and counterfactual conditionals. This should yield some insight into the interpretation and understanding of metaphorical statements, or so I hope.

3 Metaphor: interaction theory

A contemporary introduction starts with the following working definition of a metaphor: “seeing, experiencing, or talking about something in terms of something else” (Ritchie 2013, 8). My preferred elaboration of this attempted “blending” of two subjects is Black’s interaction theory. Let us take the simple and almost trivial example “Richard is a lion.” The *focus* is the word that is being used metaphorically (‘lion’); the rest of the sentence (those words not being used metaphorically) is called the ‘frame’. I will use the word frame differently (in the sense of Black’s system of associated commonplaces), so I prefer the notions of a “primary” subject (principal subject, King *Richard* in our case) and the “secondary” subject (*lion*, to be understood as a *system* of relationships, crudely put, a selection of commonplaces associated with lions). The primary subject (Richard’s character) is sometimes described as the *topic* and the secondary subject as the *vehicle*. A metaphor organizes our view of a primary subject, which is now seen through the metaphorical secondary subject. The metaphorical utterance works by “projecting upon” the primary subject a set of “associated implications” that are predicable of the secondary subject (courage, ruling position in the animal kingdom and perhaps voice). When one imagines all the ideas one associates with Richard, and all of the ideas one associates with lions, unshared ideas fall away, and what remains is the force of the focus: those commonplaces associated with both thoughts. To quote Black (1979, 28),

The maker of a metaphorical statement selects, emphasizes, suppresses and organises features of the primary subject by applying to it statements isomorphic with the members of the secondary subject’s implicative complex.

One of my favorite metaphors is the following description of philosophy (John Campbell):

Philosophy is thinking in slow motion. It breaks down, describes and assesses moves we ordinarily make at great speed.

Philosophy, the primary subject (*abstract*, less familiar) is described in terms of a more concrete secondary subject, and we construct two complexes (perhaps visualizing a slow motion sequence on TV presented to determine the winner of the 100-meter sprint). The first sentence is a metaphor; the second sentence provides instructions for the *interaction* of two complexes: (i) a camera shoots a scene with the ordinary 24 frames per second; (ii) when watching the footage of the scene, we cannot discern details and quick movements; (iii) when each film frame is captured at a rate much faster than it will be played back, time appears to slow down; (iv) when watching the footage of the scene in slow motion, we can discern details that were previously undetectable. This complex is then projected onto the primary subject, perhaps in the following way: (i) philosophy is a reflection about thinking; (ii) our ordinary reflection is quick and shallow; (iii) philosophical reflection is thorough and detailed. Recall Plato's dialogues: Socrates typically asks his interlocutor to slow down, to explain what he means by "...", where "..." is the concept under investigation; (iv) philosophical reflection reveals details that were previously undetectable. Black (1979, 28) describes the interaction of two fields (subjects) as follows:

(i) the presence of the primary subject incites the hearer to select some of the secondary subject's properties; and (ii) invites him to construct a parallel "implicative complex" that can fit the primary subject; and (iii) reciprocally induces parallel changes in the secondary subject.

This interpretative strategy is compatible with the fact that the interpretation of live metaphor is open-ended and indeterminate.

4 Jokes

Interaction (or sometimes collision) of two subjects (domains) is typical of the main linguistic phenomena I would like to compare: metaphors, counterfactual conditionals and jokes. Let me start with the last item on this list.

Davidson criticizes Black and rejects the idea that “associated with a metaphor is a definite cognitive content that its author wishes to convey and that the interpreter must grasp if he is to get the message” (Davidson 2001, 262). In his non-cognitive account he compares metaphors to certain “fringe” phenomena (Davidson 2001, 246-263):

Metaphor is the dreamwork of language. /.../ metaphor does its work through other intermediaries—to suppose it can be effective only by conveying a coded message is like thinking a joke or a dream makes some statement which a clever interpreter can restate in plain prose. /.../ Joke or dream or metaphor can, like a picture or a bump on the head, make us appreciate some fact—but not by standing for, or expressing, the fact.

Well, how *do* these phenomena, jokes in particular, work? Can we learn something, for instance, by describing metaphor as “a joke with a rational but open-ended punch line?”²

According to the most influential contemporary theory, humor involves *incongruity*. Crudely put, humor is created by *bisociation*: “the perceiving of a situation or idea, in two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference” (Ritchie, G. 2004, 47). Two examples:

Doctor, help! I swallowed my wristwatch. – Does it hurt? – Only when I wind it.

Smalltalk at the table when waiting for dessert. – Oh, I adore pancakes. But everybody in my family finds this disgusting. – But why so? Many people like pancakes. As a matter of fact, I like them, too. – Great, great! You should really see my collection. I have more than seven hundreds of them already!

² In this paper I further develop and explore some of the ideas first introduced in Šuster, 1997.

The punch line in the first joke connects the “mechanical wristwatch” conceptual field or frame with the “It hurts only when ...” conceptual field typical of medical contexts and we apply both of them to the (highly unlikely) “swallow the wristwatch” situation. The second joke is based on the collision of the “like for dessert” and “like to collect stamps ...” frames (semantic or conceptual fields – I am deliberately vague about this notion). The optimal resolution of the conflict acknowledges certain impossibilities in both cases (biological in the first case, prudential in the second). The interpretation renders the punch line intelligible (understandable), but *not* really believable.

Here I rely on Carroll’s (1991) elaboration of the incongruity theory. Jokes belong to a fantasy discourse: we need not avoid equivocation, category errors, inconsistency, contradiction, irrelevance, paradox, or any other sort of incoherence with our standing body of knowledge, whether physical, behavioral, moral or prudential. The punch line concludes the joke with an unexpected *puzzle* whose solution is left to the listener to resolve. An interpretation enables the listener to reframe the preceding riddle in such a way that the punch line can be connected to the rest of the joke. The interpretation is usually quite *determinate*. It fits the punch line and the rest of the joke after the fashion of a hypothesis to the best explanation. The interpretation is *optimal*, based on our willingness to mobilize any heuristic to solve a problem, so long as the heuristic delivers an answer. Yet, there always remains something wrong somewhere in the interpretation, no matter how optimal for resolving the initial puzzle.

Jokes are often based on ambiguity, wordplay and *metaphors* (comparisons):

An organization is like a tree full of monkeys, all on different limbs at different levels. The monkeys on top look down and see a tree full of smiling faces. The monkeys on the bottom look up and see nothing but assholes.

The *bisociation* of an organization (company) and a tree full of monkeys is resolved in a metaphorical way: “seeing, experiencing, or talking about something in terms of something else.” There is, however, an important difference: “the organization of the joke calls forth a determinate interpretation that is barely susceptible to the accretion of further nuance /.../, the kind of interpretation elicited by jokes is at odds with at least our ideals concerning the protracted interpretive play that artworks are supposed to educe” (Carroll 1991, 331). This includes, I would say,

the functioning of good metaphors – their open-endedness, special suggestiveness, a call for creative elaboration and the special insight they offer (just compare the metaphorical description of philosophy to the above description of an organization). Moreover, recall that according to Black, good metaphors are based on *interaction*; the presence of the primary subject reciprocally induces parallel changes in the secondary subject (not so in the organization/monkey tree joke).

5 Counterfactual conditionals

Let us add counterfactual conditionals to the mix. Richard was not a lion, so “Richard, the lion-hearted” expresses a falsity. According to Weiss (1961, 164), the metaphor enables us to express two truths in terms of conditionals: “Were Richard an animal, he would be a lion,” and “Were a lion human, it would be a Richard.” The first says that Richard is courageous, the second that lions are rulers. Counterfactuals mark out the outlines of a potentiality, the core of a substance according to Weiss, and apparently the blending of these two frames tells us that “Richard and lions are rulers by nature in the double sense of having a native gift to rule and a native right to rule. They are substantial beings possessed of gifts and rights, who deserve to rule because of the rights and who now rule because of the gifts” (Weiss 1961, 166).

I will dwell neither upon the Aristotelian terminology (potentialities, capacities and substances) nor on Victorian imperial ideology; let me just mention that the counterfactual supposed to explain the metaphor is just as puzzling as the initial metaphor. Consider the well-known lines (Simon & Garfunkel)

I'd rather be a sparrow than a snail
 Yes I would, if I could, I surely would
 I'd rather be a hammer than a nail
 Yes I would, if I only could, I surely would

The first and the third line are metaphorical, and even the explanation is given, in the second and the fourth lines, almost strictly following Weiss:

If I could be a hammer or a nail, I would rather be hammer than a nail.

Nevertheless, this hardly less metaphorical than the original: how *could* I be a hammer or a nail? The supposition involves a categorical mistake. The conditional has an impossible antecedent, and we are at a loss when trying normal routes of interpretation. We are left with the consequent and the puzzle of the initial metaphor. The blending of two logically incompatible frames indicates the structure of a joke, but there is no resolution in a punchline, just seeing one conceptual field (human relationships? life attitudes?) in terms of another (tool work) with the characteristic open texture of metaphor. This is also true of the following methodological observation attributed to Maslow:

If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to treat everything as if it were a nail.

We might find this remark “funnier” than the Simon and Garfunkel line – perhaps because it is less indeterminate and the blending/clash of two fields (tool work, methodology) is more perspicuous. Still, a comparison of metaphors and jokes with counterfactual conditionals is instructive. How, for instance, do we interpret the following?

If it had been the case that p , then it would have been the case that q .

My starting point will be a famous footnote:

If two people are arguing ‘If p , then q ?’ and are both in doubt as to p , they are adding p hypothetically to their stock of knowledge and arguing on that basis about q ; /.../ We can say that they are fixing their degree of belief in q given p (Ramsey 1978, 143).

The proposal is to add the antecedent (hypothetically) to your stock of knowledge (or beliefs), and then consider whether or not the consequent is true. Your belief about the conditional should be the same as your hypothetical belief, under this condition, about the consequent. Since a counterfactual conditional is a conditional containing an if-clause which is *contrary* to fact, falsity of the antecedent is at least weakly implied, and instructions have to be modified. According to Stalnaker (1968), we add the antecedent and then make adjustments to the system of beliefs in order to maintain consistency (without modifying the hypothetical belief in the antecedent), and we then consider whether the consequent is true. Consider the following:

If that match had been scratched, it would have lighted.

We delete or change those beliefs which conflict with the fact that the match was (actually) not scratched. Since a well made match, dry enough, with sufficient oxygen will light (those facts are kept), the conditional is true ("That match lights" can be inferred from "That match is scratched," as Goodman would say). According to Stalnaker, a possible world is the ontological analogue of a stock of hypothetical beliefs. The following truth conditions for "If it had been the case that A , then it would have been the case that B ," are now proposed (Stalnaker 1968, 102):

Consider a possible world in which A is true, and which otherwise differs minimally from the actual world. 'If A , then B ' is true (false) just in case B is true (false) in that possible world.

What kind of a possible world? To revisit Goodman's example, remove the fact that the match was not lit and keep everything else (the match is well made, dry and there is oxygen around). A *minimal* change in actuality leads to the alternative possible world to be considered in evaluation. I will avoid Stalnaker's ontological interpretation and remain faithful to Ramsey and his doxastic starting points. Ramsey speaks about the stock of knowledge, but in order to compare various possible "deviations" from normality, I will speak about a person's doxastic state (DS) in the very broad sense used, for instance, by Vorobej (2006, 47): "We'll use the term "epistemic state" to refer to a person's (huge and loosely defined) set of current beliefs, desires, emotions, hopes, and intentions, which, at any given time, captures how that person views the world and sees herself as situated within her environment." DS includes everything that could in principle play a role in the formation of a belief: implicit and explicit knowledge, accepted norms of behavior, prudential reasoning, and "normal" reactions and attitudes. When evaluating counterfactuals, we consider the set of possible worlds compatible with DS, ordered by similarity to the actual world. The content of the counterfactual is semantically unambiguous, so the possible world we imagine (one where the antecedent is true, unlike the real world) is (relatively) well *determined*.

6 Riddles and Irony

According to Carroll, the punch line of a joke first strikes us a *puzzle*. And metaphorical expressions, like verbal irony, are supposed to change the meaning of the words (*pace* Davidson). So let me mention, briefly, these two types of discourse. Verbal irony is a language device in which the meaning that a speaker employs is *different* from the meaning that is ostensibly expressed. In the famous speech after the assassination of Caesar, Mark Antony literally praises Brutus ("And Brutus is an honourable man,") while the intended meaning is a condemnation.

A *descriptive* riddle describes an animal, person, plant or object in an intentionally enigmatic manner, to suggest something different from the correct answer. "What runs about all day and lies under the bed at night?" suggests "A dog," but the answer is "A shoe" (Riddle, 2013). To take a modern example found on the internet, "What can you serve but never eat?" The following answers were suggested: (i) McDonald's chicken wings; (ii) water (not for eating, just for drinking); or (iii) a tennis ball. The first answer takes the question to be a simple interrogative sentence, asking something about the world (the speaker expresses his dislike of a certain type of food). The second reply presupposes that the question is somehow enigmatic, and the third takes it to be a riddle – a deliberately enigmatic or ambiguous question requiring a thoughtful and witty answer. It is even amusing, for that matter, since we have a typical collision of two fields (serve a dish and serve a ball) and the resolution ("punch line") is quite surprising.

7 Comparisons

I hope that the reader will notice a rich network of interconnections between these linguistic phenomena (metaphor, joke, counterfactual, riddle and irony). Aristotle viewed metaphors as riddles; some metaphors are funny; jokes are based on riddles; some jokes use metaphors; some riddles are funny and some are based on metaphors; irony involves a change in the meaning. Metaphors break semantic rules and seem to contradict our knowledge about the world; so do jokes and sometimes riddles. On a more theoretical level, "In asking us to imaginatively recreate the world, metaphors are similar to conditionals, for conditionals, too, may ask us to imagine a different world" (Cohen 1998). Most of these phenomena involve a certain blending (or clash) of two different domains

requiring an optimal solution. The following table summarizes the interpretive strategies:

Table 1: Interpretive strategies

		Metaphor	Joke	Counterfactual	Riddle	Irony
1.	Initial <i>incongruity</i> with the <i>DS</i> system	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (only apparent)	Yes
2.	Interpretation is <i>conservative</i> with respect to <i>DS</i>	Yes	No (anything goes)	No (minimal change)	Yes	Yes
3.	<i>Rationality</i> of the interpretation	Yes (broad)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
4.	Meaning <i>conservation</i>	No (?)	Sometimes	Yes	Sometimes	No

I will comment on the entries line by line. All of the phenomena invoke a certain initial *incongruity* with the recipient's doxastic system *DS*: metaphors are literally false; the situations described in jokes are blatantly incoherent with our standing body of knowledge; the antecedent of an "if" sentence is false; the questions posed by riddles are, at least at first sight, impossible to answer, and irony reverses the meanings of words.

A *conservative* interpretation or resolution of the initial incongruity tries to preserve what we believe about the world: jokes and counterfactuals (in a certain aspect) stand out in this respect. The conditional asks one to consider, at least hypothetically, a *change* in what we believe about the world, but the change is minimal: a conditional is true only in the case when its consequent is true at every member of some set of worlds at which its antecedent is true, and this set contains worlds which are most *similar* to the actual world. The resolution of the initial incongruity resembles a "calculation" based on our knowledge of explanatory and nomic relations in the world (e.g. "If the river were to rise another two feet, the fields would be flooded."). Not so in the case of jokes where "anything goes", and a transgression of all norms is allowed. Consider the following pair:

What do you get when you cross an earthworm and a hedgehog? Barbed wire.

What do you get when you cross an elephant and a mouse? Nobel Prize for medicine.

The first question is a standard riddle-like joke requiring a drastic change in our DS, describing an impossible world. The second question is posed *after* we hear the first one, so we expect another impossibility to be resolved in the joke-like manner. But the reply indicates that we are to imagine a *counterfactual* situation (some kind of DNA manipulation, etc.). If someone had produced a hybrid between an elephant and a mouse – a magnificent scientific achievement – she would (really) receive a Nobel Prize! Still, in the context of the first question, the reply is surprising: we expect an *error* (typical of jokes), but there is none. The error, characteristic for jokes according to the incongruity theory, lies precisely in the fact that there is *no* second error. One is reminded of the title of the book on paradoxes and puzzles: *There Are Two Errors in the the Title of This Book* (Martin, 1995). The first one is easy (or not?) to spot (“the” appears twice), and the second error is that there is *no* second error. Once you ponder the complexities of this title, you get lost in the paradoxes of self-reference. And the “Nobel Prize” is a typical auto-referential meta-joke, betraying our expectations about jokes (any kind of normal expectations are, of course, also part of DS in my sense). You expect a humorous impossibility, and you get a counterfactual conditional instead.³

Cohen (1998) suggests that the interpretation of a metaphor may require a change in what we believe about the world, but mostly the interpretation is *conservative* with respect to DS; it asks us to consider a change in *how* we see the world, not *what* we see in the world, a change in attitude and not a change in belief. This is in line with tradition: according to Horatius (*Ars Poetica*), metaphors represent relations that are harmonic and true, but not novelties. Contemporary psychological investigations seem to indicate that new emergent properties—not

³ This effect might also appear in the way modern poetry (mis)uses metaphors. *Jonah* (1971) by T. Šalamun begins with the following lines:

how does the sun set? like snow
what color is the sea? large

We expect a colorful poetic comparison, but we get none, just a subversion of our traditional metaphorical expectations. Or do we get something, perhaps an image, after all? Modern poetry is typically elusive.

part of the hearer's representation for the vehicle or the topic—play a fundamental role in metaphor interpretation (Tourangeau & Rips 1991). Whether we learn something new when we interpret the metaphor, or merely get old material in new clothing is an important issue that I cannot address here. In any case, the potential extension of knowledge is conservative (the system is not modified) with respect to DS. Ironic statements are usually just articulations of our beliefs (our DS system). Riddles also introduce new perspectives (we notice that tennis balls can be grouped together with some dishes), but this does not represent a change in DS.

The third row tells us something about the *rationality* of the interpretation and the resolution of the initial incongruity. Again, jokes are the only exceptions. The situation described in a joke strikes us as blatantly inconsistent with our DS, and it usually remains so even after the resolution. The interpretation of a joke is optimal (the simplest, most attractive, all the pieces of the puzzle fit together) but certainly *not* rational (just consider all of the jokes mentioned so far), and this tension is usually the locus of the amusement. But I think that the way a good metaphor gets us to notice things, connections and similarities is *rational* and truthful in a certain broad sense (not just picturesque or emotional). The interpretation of counterfactuals, riddles and irony is, of course, also rational.

The final row is crucial for the semantic debate: should we require that the interpretation change the meaning of some words or not? It is clear that, in counterfactuals, words retain their literal meaning, and in ironic speech, the *real* meaning is concealed or contradicted by the literal meanings of the words. Riddles sometimes explore ambiguities, extended meanings or puns: “What's black and white and red all over?”—“A newspaper”. Here both ‘red’ and ‘all over’ are to be understood additionally in the sense of ‘read’ and ‘everywhere,’ respectively (Riddle, 2013). The same is true of jokes (I find the riddle quite amusing; again we have a clash of two conceptual fields). How about metaphors? Well, according to Davidson (2001, 259), metaphors have no meaning in addition to their literal sense or meaning: “What distinguishes metaphor is not meaning but use – in this it is like asserting, hinting, lying, promising, or criticizing.” And why is it not like *irony*, carrying—at least temporarily—a different, figurative meaning, as suggested by Black (1978, 141) in his reply to Davidson?

8 Metaphorical content?

By itself, a comparison of these “deviant” linguistic phenomena does not constitute an account of metaphor, but still, it seems to me that metaphors are, with respect to (non)literal meaning, closer to irony than to riddles and counterfactuals. When saying “a tennis ball is something that you can serve but never eat,” the meaning of the words does not change. What we have is just a very uncommon way of grouping things together. But when Mark Antony describes Brutus as an honorable man, the audience already knows that Brutus stabbed Caesar on the Ides of March, so ‘honorable’ ought not to be taken literally.

Davidson gives several arguments to support his claim that the notion of nonliteral meaning is the central error about metaphor. The following is perhaps his main line (Moran 2017, 382):

If there were anything said or asserted in the metaphorical expression beyond what it literally states, then it would be just the sort of thing that does submit to paraphrase. There is nothing there to paraphrase.

Nothing to paraphrase, so no figurative meaning? The sort of thing one can paraphrase is, according to Davidson, propositional in nature, a definite cognitive content that its author wishes to convey and that the interpreter must grasp if he is to get the message. However, one can agree that it is very difficult or almost impossible to paraphrase metaphors without denying that they have a special cognitive content. When we solve the ‘puzzle’ of a metaphor, our mind is not blank or filled with images only; it has a mental content, determined by the literal meaning. Content or thought can perhaps be ineffable, not fully expressed in words (Moran 2017, 384). Peacocke even argues that when we experience one thing metaphorically-as-another our experience thereby has a distinctive kind of representational content. Understanding a metaphor expressed in language involves thinking or imagining, the content of which is a metaphor. There would be no metaphorical language if there were no mental states whose contents involve metaphor (Peacocke 2009, 260).

Moreover, according to Davidson (2001, 245), metaphors cannot be wrong:

A metaphor implies a kind and degree of artistic success; there are no unsuccessful metaphors, just as there are no unfunny jokes. There are tasteless metaphors, but these are turns that nevertheless have brought something off, even if it were not worth bringing off or could have been brought off better.

But then, as Moran (2017, 385) rightly remarks:

There will be nothing for understanding or misunderstanding a metaphorical utterance to consist in, nothing to the idea of getting it right or getting it wrong when we construe what the ‘figurative meaning’ might be, there’s nothing for the speaker’s audience to be agreeing with or dissenting from /.../.

But consider, for instance, “fate is a blind camel” by Zuhayr (520 - 609). Borges readily provides an explanation (through the mouth of Averroes): destiny tramples men like an old, blind camel; every man has felt at some moment in his life that destiny is powerful yet clumsy, innocent yet inhuman (Borges 1964). Not every animal will do: “Fate is a blind snail” will definitely fail to convey the intended content; the metaphor would be unsuccessful, not just tasteless. Or take, “Trying to understand superstition rationally is like trying to pick up something made of wood by using a magnet” (Pullman 2018, this comparison is clearly figurative; I do not think that metaphor and simile are essentially different figures). Dawkins, who strongly disagrees with the thesis that the magisterium of science covers the empirical realm only, would probably dissent, not because the metaphor (simile) is tasteless, but because it is wrong (for him at least). Metaphors can be unsuccessful and plainly wrong.

9 Conclusion

The interpretation of metaphors, jokes, counterfactuals, riddles and irony starts from noticing an incongruity with the doxastic system of the interpreter. The incongruity initiates a search for an optimal solution, which in the case of metaphors and jokes, is based on a certain blending of two different domains. However, to understand and interpret does not always mean to *decode* (as with riddles and irony). Metaphors get us to notice things and invite us to see things

in a new way and thereby produce an insight of a sort that may not be susceptible to capture in plain prose. Nevertheless, they can still communicate rich and truthful information about the real world. Is this information propositional in nature? Does it have any cognitive content? Often we should say *no* to the first question, but this does not imply the same reply to the second question.

“In science you just have to be able to drill in very hard wood and go on thinking beyond the point where thinking begins to hurt,” famously wrote Werner Heisenberg. Ineffable thoughts and metaphorical representational content will hurt the feelings of more traditional thinkers. Still, I hope that I have at least sketched some ideas showing that there is a special dependence of the figurative meaning on the literal meaning; there is method in the interpretation of metaphorical language, not just a passing theory; there is content, not just usage and imagination.*

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* The article was written as part of the Research program no. P6-0144, which is financed by the Slovenian Research Agency.

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